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ABSTRACT

Adult participation in learning in England and across the nations of the United Kingdom was examined in 2002, and the survey findings were compared to those of earlier surveys. Overall, 42% of the 4,896 people interviewed in the weighted sample survey of adults aged 17 and over reported having engaged in learning in the past 3 years. For the first time in 20 years, the survey showed participation by women equaling that by men. Although overall participation in 2002 was lower than in 2001, participation among individuals between the ages of 20 and 24, unemployed people, and others who were not working rose over the year. Adults in professional and managerial groups were more than twice as likely as the poorest, least skilled, and retired adults in the United Kingdom to participate in learning. Just 27% of the 2, 627 people with no access to the Internet reported current or recent participation in learning in contrast to 58% of those with home and work access to the Internet (2,064) and 71% of the 141 people with Internet access only at work. Nearly four in five current/recent learners expected to participate in learning in the next 3 years, whereas 85% of those who reported not participating in learning since full-time education thought it unlikely that they would participate in learning in the future. (Contains 21 tables/figures.) (MN)

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# Two steps forward, one step back

## The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2002

Fiona Aldridge
and Alan Tuckett

niace
promoting adult learning

supported by

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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

NIACE's website on the Internet is http://www.niace.org.uk

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# Introduction

This year's survey of adult participation in learning tells a complicated tale. Firstly, we have made little progress over a generation in tackling the learning divide that leaves a large chunk of the UK population recognising the importance of learning to quality of life and security at work, while believing it is not for them. Overall, just 42% of the 4,896 people interviewed in a weighted sample survey of adults aged 17 and over in the UK say they have engaged in learning in the last three years.

For the first time in more than 20 years of surveys, the data shows participation by women equalling that of men. In part, this will be explained by the increasing presence of women in the workforce, and the steady decline in the proportion of men at work, since work remains a major site of learning.

The second key finding is that the 2002 results show a fall in participation from the 2001 survey. However, participation among 20-24-year-olds, unemployed people and others who are not working, rose over the year. Interestingly, there has been a sharper decline among professional, managerial and administrative groups than among less-skilled adults, although this was from a dramatically higher base. The dip this year is the *one step back* of the title of our survey paper. The findings apply to learning in all kinds of contexts, from formal institutions, to the workplace, to informal learning situations. This mirrors a reported drop in participation in the publicly-funded learning and skills sector reported earlier this year by the Learning and Skills Council.

Thirdly, the *two steps forward* in our title reflects the suggestion made by the data, that this year's findings are a correction in a trend where participation has risen steadily over the last six years, except for the least skilled and retired, and for 17-19 year olds, where there has been a growth in the numbers at work. However, the trends show how intransigent the cultural inhibitions to the creation of a learning society remain. Adults in professional and managerial groups (AB) are more than twice as likely as the poorest, least skilled and retired (DE) to participate. The young participate in greater numbers than the old. You are more likely to get access to learning if you have a job, and there are still wide variations in participation in different UK regions.

Older people's participation presents a real challenge. The changing demography of the workforce, and the increased longevity among retired groups both point to the need to foster participation in learning in later life, for work and of course to support a fulfilled and active life. However, participation rates among retired people have remained steady or dropped. Yet the evidence of the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre, sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills points to the health benefits from continuing in learning. The continuing dominance of labour market concerns in education and skills policy seems unlikely to lead to concerted policy action to make a real difference to older people's learning opportunities – at least in the immediate future.

The trend towards online learning reveals another dimension of the continuing learning divide. Just 27% of people with no access to the internet reported current or recent participation, in contrast with 58% of those with home access, and 71% of people with access only at work. In this area, as in the survey as a whole, there is a very strong link between recent experience of learning and an expectation of future participation. You are more than twice as likely to plan future participation if you have access to the net. Almost four in five current/recent learners expect to take up learning in the next three years, yet 85% of those who say they have done nothing since full-time education think it unlikely that they will take up learning in the future.

All in all, the survey shows the need for sustained policies to stimulate demand if we are to create a learning society for all. If the overall trend shows rising participation in the last six years, it shows, too

that progress reinforces the gap between the learning-haves and the learning-have-nots. We are a society where nine in ten believe that learning makes a positive difference to their work chances, to quality of life, and to their children's prospects. Yet one in four of us still believe that learning is not for the likes of us. Until we change those perceptions, and the responsiveness of our system to the needs of that quarter of the population, participation surveys are likely to report at best modest progress.

## Technical Notes

This survey, undertaken for NIACE, by RSGB, interviewed a weighted sample of 4,896 adults, aged 17 and over, in the UK (with a boosted sample in Wales) from 13 February to 3 March 2002. A range of questions was asked on adult participation in learning. The results from the following two questions are contained in this report. More detailed analysis and commentary on the full range of questions will be included in a report to be published by NIACE in November 2002.

> "Learning can mean practising, studying or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full time, or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like a college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished."
>
> Which of the following statements most applies to you?
> 01: I am currently doing some learning activity
> 02: I have done some learning activity in the last three years
> 03: I have studied or learned but it was over three years ago
> 04: I have not studied or learned since I left full-time education
> 05: Don't know
>
> How likely are you to take up learning in the next three years?
> 01: Very likely
> 02: Fairly likely
> 03: Fairly unlikely
> 04: Very unlikely
> 05: Don't know

As well as asking about participation in learning and future intentions to learn, every three years (in 1996, 1999 and now in 2002) the NIACE adult participation survey also includes a range of other questions to examine issues such as where, what and why people are learning; how people find out about learning opportunities; whether or not people are working towards qualifications; and what the motivations for, barriers to and benefits of, learning. In the intervening years (2000 and 2001), only the questions on participation and future intentions are asked. As a result, only limited analysis is available on this data as to how changes are distributed across the system.

# Participation in Learning

## Participation and gender

- The survey shows that nearly one in four adults are currently learning (see Table 1).
- Forty-two per cent of adults have been learning in the last three years.
- For the first time, within the NIACE series of participation surveys, men and women are currently participating in equal numbers. A greater proportion of women (39 per cent) than men (34 per cent) however, say that they have not participated since leaving full-time education.

**Table 1: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, men and women compared**

| | Total | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 2,381 | 2,515 |
| Current learning | 23 | 23 | 23 |
| **Recent learning (in the last 3 years)** | **19** | **19** | **19** |
| All current/recent learning | 42 | 43 | 42 |
| Past learning (more than 3 years ago) | 21 | 23 | 19 |
| None since leaving full-time education/don't know | 36 | 34 | 39 |

*Tables are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.*

*Tables are percentaged vertically unless otherwise specified.*

## Participation and social class

- The learning divide continues to be alive and well – 17 per cent of professional and managerial workers (ABs) have not participated in any learning since leaving school, compared with 58 per cent of DEs (see Table 2).

**Table 2: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by social class**

| | Total | AB | C1 | C2 | DE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 906 | 1,398 | 1,084 | 1,509 |
| Current learning | 23 | 35 | 32 | 17 | 12 |
| Recent learning (in the last 3 years) | 19 | 25 | 22 | 19 | 13 |
| **All current/recent learning** | **42** | **60** | **54** | **37** | **25** |
| Past learning (more than 3 years ago) | 21 | 23 | 22 | 25 | 17 |
| None since leaving full-time education/don't know | 36 | 17 | 24 | 39 | 58 |

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## Participation and age

- In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to participate in learning (see Table 3).
- Over 70 per cent of those aged between 17-24 are current/recent participants.
- Around half of those in the 25-54 age group are current/recent participants.
- Three in ten of those aged 55-64 are current/recent participants.
- Current/recent participation falls dramatically for those aged 65 and over.

**Table 3: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by age**

| | Total | 17-19 | 20-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 250 | 336 | 887 | 1,002 | 757 | 705 | 583 | 375 |
| Current learning | 23 | 61 | 45 | 24 | 25 | 24 | 14 | 11 | 5 |
| Recent learning (in the last 3 years) | 19 | 17 | 27 | 26 | 24 | 20 | 16 | 9 | 5 |
| **All current/recent learning** | **42** | **78** | **72** | **51** | **49** | **44** | **30** | **20** | **10** |
| Past learning (more than 3 years ago) | 21 | 2 | 11 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 25 | 25 | 27 |
| None since leaving full-time education/ don't know | 36 | 20 | 17 | 28 | 29 | 33 | 45 | 55 | 63 |

## Participation and employment

- As many part-time workers are current/recent participants as full-time workers (see Table 4).
- Although around five per cent fewer unemployed people participate than those in employment, those who are retired or not working for others reasons have much lower participation rates.

**Table 4: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by working status**

| | Total | Full-time | Part-time | Unemployed | Not working | Retired |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 2,008 | 566 | 187 | 739 | 1,188 |
| Current learning | 23 | 25 | 28 | 17 | 13 | 11 |
| Recent learning (in the last 3 years) | 19 | 26 | 23 | 29 | 17 | 8 |
| **All current/recent learning** | **42** | **52** | **51** | **46** | **31** | **19** |
| Past learning (more than 3 years ago) | 21 | 21 | 19 | 18 | 23 | 25 |
| None since leaving full-time education/ don't know | 36 | 27 | 30 | 35 | 47 | 56 |

## Participation in learning and future intentions to learn, by region and nation

- Where people live has an impact upon how likely they are to learn (see Table 5).
- The highest levels of participation can be seen in the South East and North East.
- Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands, the North West and the Eastern region all report below average participation rates.
- Participation in learning is above average in Scotland and below average in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Only in the North West and Eastern regions are future intentions to learn higher than current/recent participation.

**Table 5: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING AND FUTURE INTENTIONS TO LEARN, by Government Office region and by nation**

| | Base: all respondents = 100% | Current/recent participation | *Future intentions* Total likely | Total unlikely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total: United Kingdom | 4,896 | 42 | 41 | 57 |
| South East | 477 | 48 | 46 | 52 |
| North East | 276 | 46 | 43 | 52 |
| London | 498 | 45 | 45 | 53 |
| South West | 326 | 45 | 42 | 57 |
| East Midlands | 431 | 44 | 40 | 57 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 518 | 41 | 38 | 59 |
| West Midlands | 471 | 40 | 40 | 57 |
| North West | 639 | 39 | 40 | 59 |
| Eastern | 401 | 36 | 37 | 60 |
| Scotland | 475 | 44 | 37 | 58 |
| England | 4,036 | 42 | 41 | 56 |
| Northern Ireland | 144 | 40 | 39 | 60 |
| Wales | 241 | 39 | 37 | 59 |

*For the first time in 2002, the NIACE survey results are broken down into Government Office regions. In previous years the data has been analysed by Standard Regions (see Table 6 for breakdowns by Standard Region).*

*Due to considerable regional swings in participation between the surveys, the regional data should be treated with some caution.*

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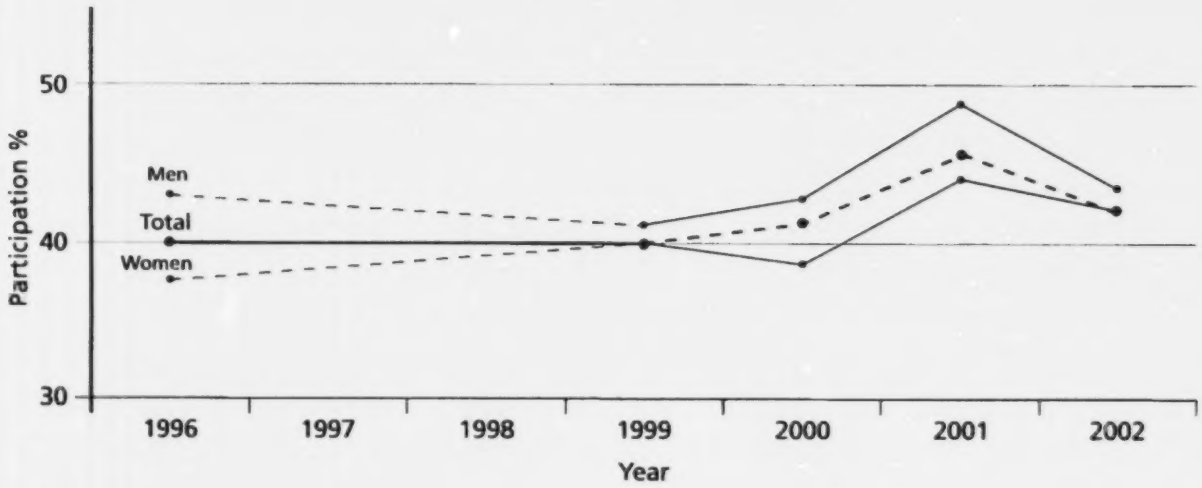
# Trends in participation

## Trends in participation and gender

- This year's findings show that 23 per cent of adults are currently learning. This represents a decrease from the 2001 survey, which reported that 29 per cent of adults were currently learning, but an increase on the 1999 and 2000 surveys, both of which reported that 22 per cent of adults were current learners (see Figure 1).
- Participation amongst men is the same in 2002 as it was in 1996. Participation amongst women, during the same period has increased from 38 per cent to 42 per cent. Participation for both men and women has increased since 1999 and decreased since 2001.
- Although equal numbers of men and women are currently participating, men continue to be more likely to be current/recent participants than women.

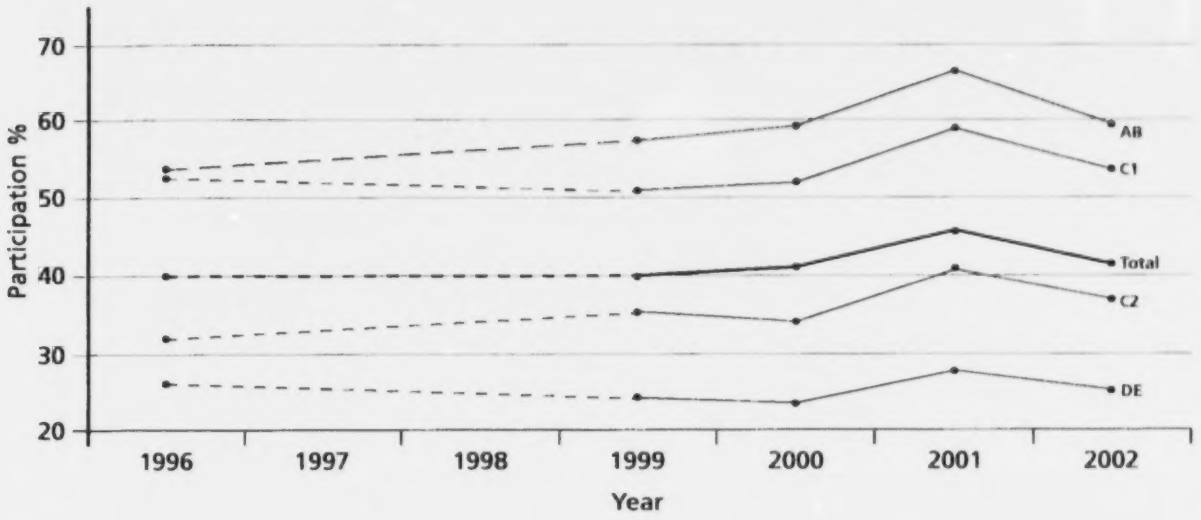
**Figure 1: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, men and women compared**




## Trends in participation and social class

- Between 1996 and 2002, participation rates for all social groups except DEs have risen (see Figure 2).
- The greatest rise in participation has been among ABs. Participation by DEs has dropped 1 per cent over this period.
- Since 2001, there has been a decrease in current/recent participation across the range. The greatest decrease has been among ABs (7 per cent) and the smallest among DEs (3 per cent). As a result, the learning divide, which has been getting wider since 1996, narrowed slightly in 2002.

**Figure 2: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by social class**




## Trends in participation and age

- Between 1996 and 2002, participation rates in all age groups, except for those aged between 17-19 and those aged over 75, have increased (see Figure 3).
- The greatest rise in participation has been among those aged 45-54.
- The number of learners aged 75+ fell by a third during this period and the number of learners aged 17-19 fell from 86 per cent to 78 per cent.
- Since 2001, participation across all age groups has fallen, except for those aged 20-24, for whom participation has risen from 65 per cent to 72 per cent.

## Trends in participation and employment

- Between 1996 and 2002, participation rates for all groups, except the retired, have risen (see Figure 4).
- The greatest gains in participation have been among part-time workers (+9 per cent) and those who are not working (+8 per cent). Much of this increase took place between the 1996 and 1999 surveys and has been maintained or improved upon since. Participation among retired people has fallen from 20 per cent to 19 per cent.
- Despite an overall decline in participation since 2001, the 2002 survey shows that participation among those who are not working has remained constant and has risen among those who are unemployed.

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**Figure 3: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by age**

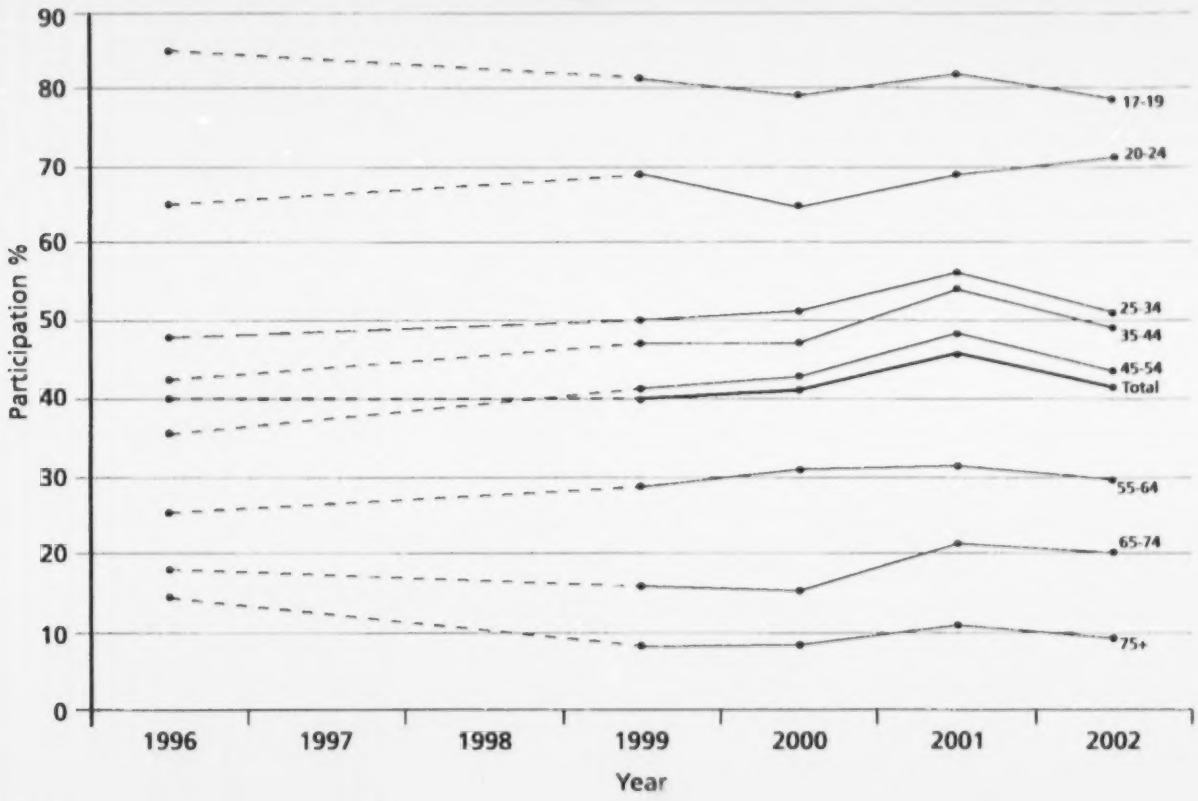
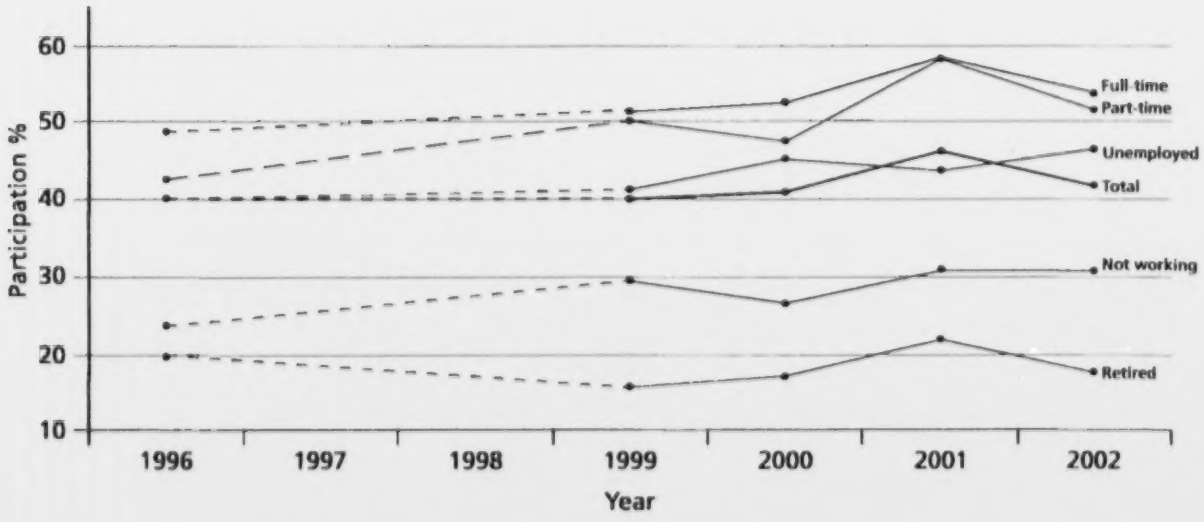



**Figure 4: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by working status**



## Trends in participation across the English regions

- In previous years, NIACE survey results have been analysed by Standard Region. For the first time in 2002, the data can now also be analysed by Government Office region (see Table 6, or see Table 5 for breakdowns by Government Office region).
- Between 1996 and 2002 there have been considerable regional swings in participation.
- The South West, South East and North West have experienced the greatest percentage increase in participation over the last six years.
- Yorkshire and Humberside and the East Midlands have experienced the greatest decline in participation over the last six years.

**Table 6: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by standard region**

| | 1996 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,755 | 5,054 | 3,908 | 5,902 | 4,896 |
| South East | 38 | 42 | 43 | 47 | 44 |
| North | 45 | 34 | 32 | 44 | 43 |
| Greater London | 44 | 46 | 46 | 52 | 45 |
| South West | 37 | 37 | 42 | 53 | 45 |
| East Midlands | 50 | 48 | 44 | 45 | 44 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 52 | 42 | 40 | 42 | 41 |
| West Midlands | 35 | 34 | 48 | 47 | 40 |
| North West | 35 | 41 | 39 | 54 | 41 |
| East Anglia | 43 | 48 | 37 | 52 | 39 |

*Due to considerable regional swings in participation between the surveys, the regional data should be treated with some caution.*

## Trends in participation across the nations of the UK

- Between 1996 and 2002 there have been considerable national swings in participation (see Table 7).
- However, participation in England is the same in 2002 as it was in 1996, while participation in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has increased over the period.

**Table 7: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by UK nation**

| | 1996 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,755 | 5,054 | 3,908 | 5,902 | 4, 896 |
| England | 42 | 41 | 42 | 50 | 42 |
| Wales | 37 | 43 | 33 | 39 | 39 |
| Scotland | 38 | 33 | 34 | 36 | 44 |
| Northern Ireland | 28 | 32 | n/a | n/a | 40 |

*The 2000 and 2001 surveys were limited to Great Britain. However recalculating the participation rates for the 1996, 1999 and 2002 surveys to take out the Northern Ireland sample leaves the Great Britain overall rate unchanged from those reported for the UK as a whole.*

# Future intentions to learn

## Gender, learning status and future intentions to learn

- The survey shows that 41 per cent of adults report that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years (see Table 8).
- For the first time, within the NIACE series of participation surveys, more women than men say that they are likely to take up learning in the future.
- This year's survey reinforces the view that current participation affects future intentions to learn. 78 per cent of current learners report that they are likely to take up learning in the future. 85 per cent of those who have not been involved in learning since leaving full-time education say that they are unlikely to take up learning in the future.

**Table 8: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by gender and learning status**

| | Total | Men | Women | Current learners | Recent learners | Past learners | None since full-time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 2,381 | 2,515 | 1,130 | 943 | 1,039 | 1,747 |
| Very likely | 22 | 21 | 23 | 55 | 28 | 9 | 5 |
| Fairly likely | 19 | 18 | 19 | 24 | 32 | 19 | 8 |
| **Total likely** | **41** | **40** | **41** | **78** | **61** | **28** | **13** |
| Fairly unlikely | 10 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 12 | 15 | 8 |
| Very unlikely | 47 | 47 | 47 | 12 | 24 | 55 | 77 |
| **Total unlikely** | **57** | **57** | **56** | **19** | **36** | **69** | **85** |
| Don't know | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 |

- Since last year's survey, the proportion of people who say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years has fallen from 49 per cent to 41 per cent. This year's figure, however is still higher than that reported in both 1996 and 1999 (38 per cent) (see Figure 5).
- In 2002, both men and women reported being more likely to learn in the future than they did in 1996 or 1999. However the increase in future intentions to learn has been greater for women (4 per cent) than for men (1 per cent).
- The decline in future intentions to learn since 2001 is greatest among current and recent learners. Future intentions to learn have remained constant among those who have not done any learning in the past three years and have increased among those who have now participated since leaving full-time education (see Figure 6).
- Between 1996 and 2002, there has been an increase in future intentions to learn for all groups except for those who have not participated since leaving full-time education.

**Figure 5: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by gender**

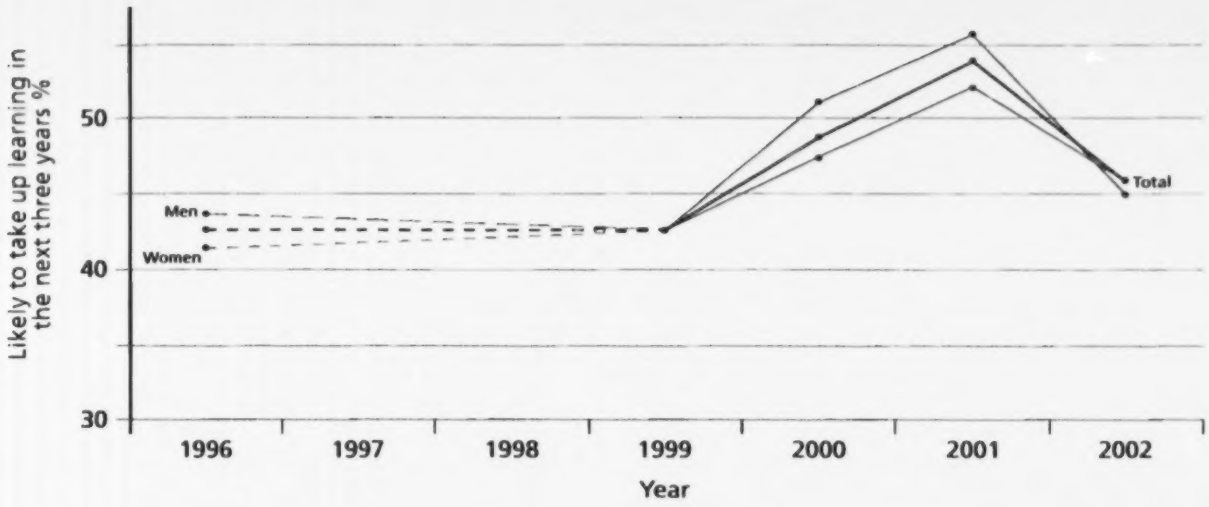
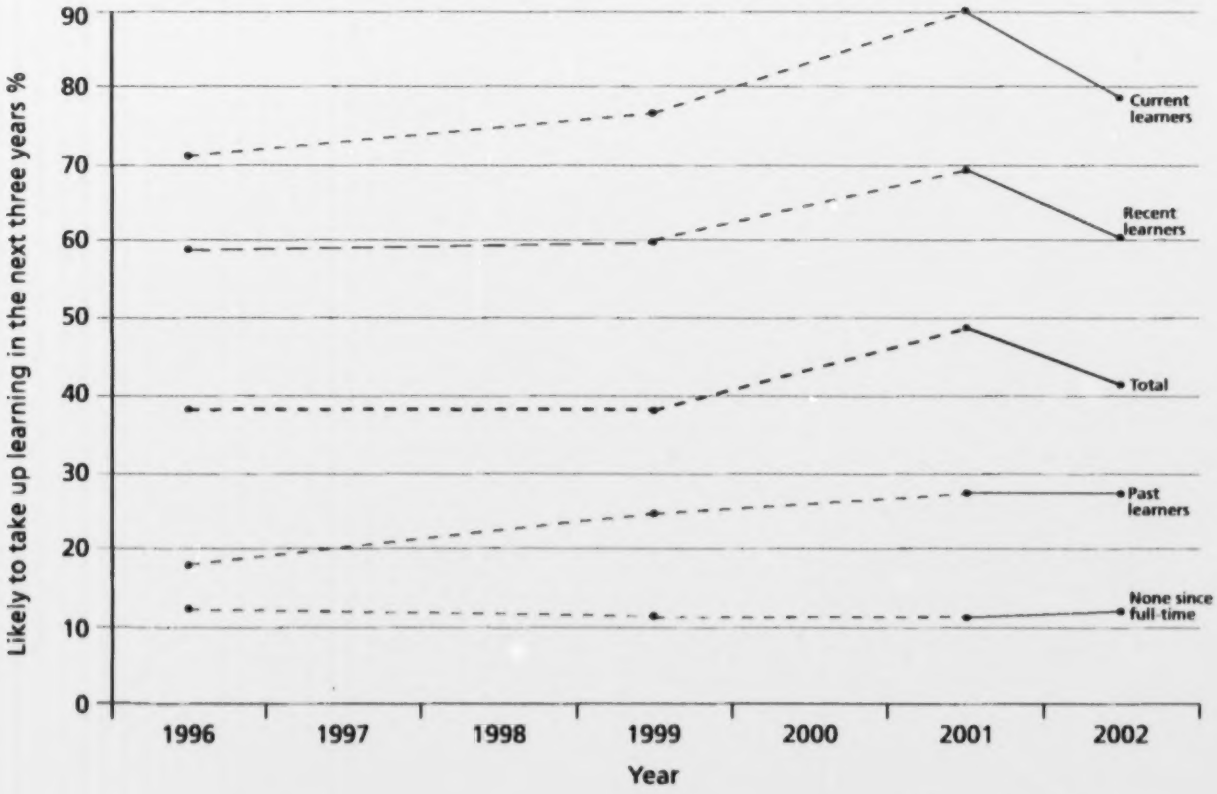



**Figure 6: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by learning status**

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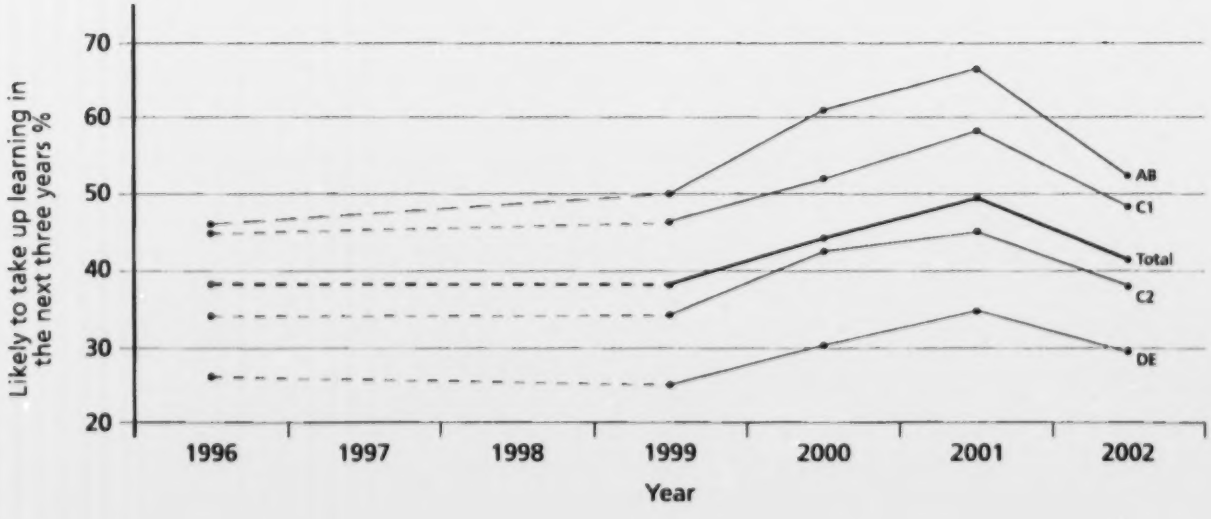
## Social class and future intentions to learn

- Data on future intentions to learn shows that we can expect the learning divide to continue into the future. 52 per cent of professional and managerial workers (ABs) say that they are likely to take up learning in the future, compared with only 29 per cent of DEs (see Table 9 and Figure 7).
- Between 1996 and 2002, future intentions to learn increased across all social groups. The greatest rise was among ABs (6 per cent) and the smallest among DEs (1 per cent).
- Since 2001, there has been a decrease in future intentions across the range. The largest decrease has been among ABs (14 per cent) and the smallest among DEs (5 per cent). As a result, the difference in future intentions to learn between social groups, which has been getting wider since 1996, narrowed in 2002.

**Table 9: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by social class**

| | Total | AB | C1 | C2 | DE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 906 | 1,398 | 1,084 | 1,509 |
| Total likely | 41 | 52 | 48 | 38 | 29 |
| Total unlikely | 57 | 47 | 49 | 60 | 68 |

**Figure 7: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by social class**




## Age and future intentions to learn

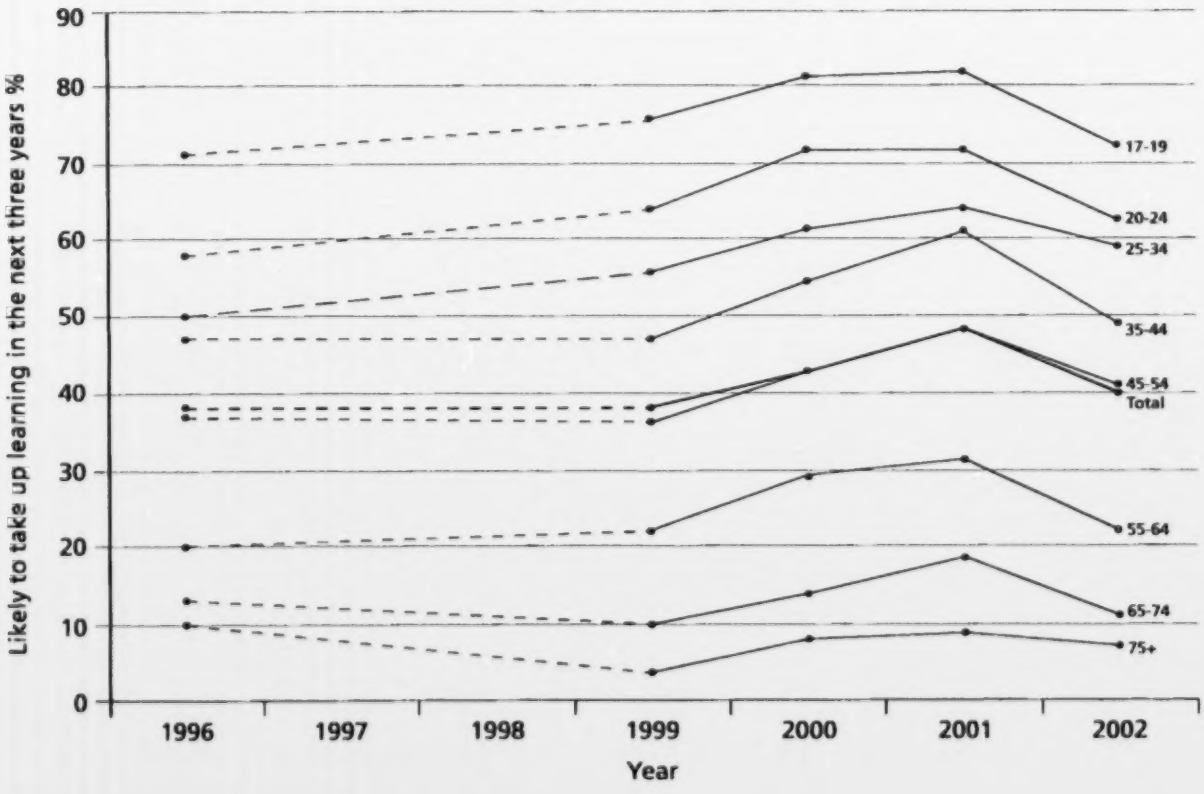
- Future intentions to learn decline with age. 72 per cent of 17-19 year olds say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years compared with only 42 per cent of those aged 45-54. For those adults aged 55 and over, the drop in future intentions to learn is even more severe (see Table 10 and Figure 8).

- Between 1996 and 2002, there has been an increase in future intentions to learn among the working age population. During the same period, future intentions to learn fell from 14 per cent to 12 per cent for those aged 65-75 and from 10 per cent to 7 per cent for those aged 75 and over.

**Table 10: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by age**

| | Total | 17-19 | 20-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 250 | 336 | 887 | 1,002 | 757 | 705 | 583 | 375 |
| Total likely | 41 | 72 | 63 | 59 | 50 | 42 | 23 | 12 | 7 |
| Total unlikely | 57 | 23 | 33 | 38 | 48 | 56 | 75 | 86 | 92 |

**Figure 8: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by age**




## Employment and future intentions to learn

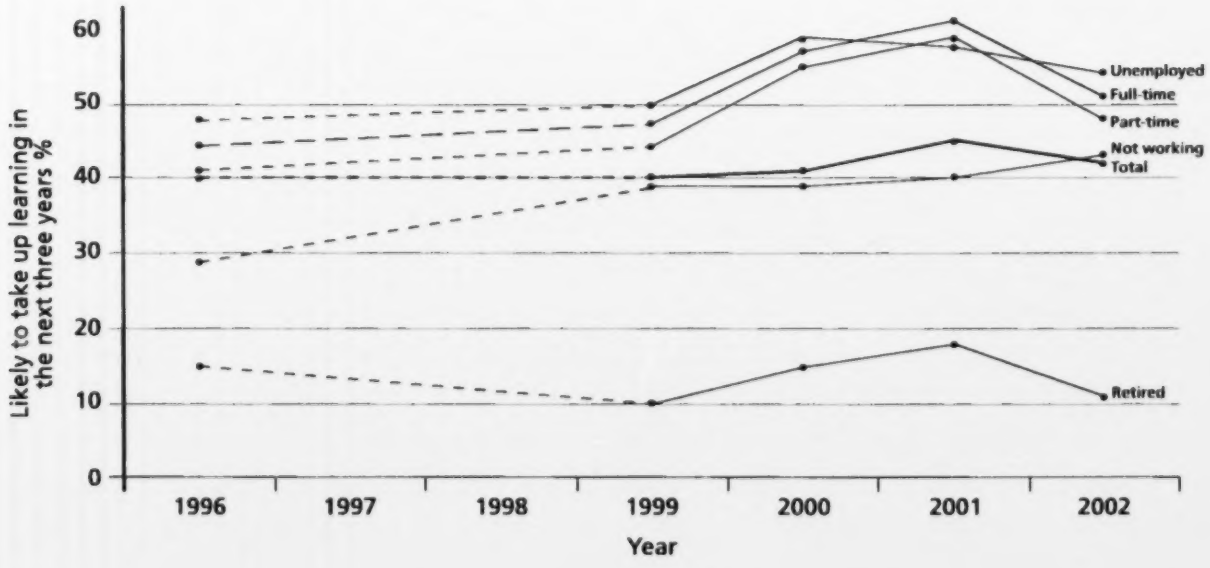
- Only one in eight retired people see themselves as future learners. The group who see themselves as most likely to take up learning in the next three years are the unemployed (see Table 11 and Figure 9).

- Between 1996 and 2002, future intentions to learn have increased across all groups except for the retired, where they have decreased from 16 per cent to 12 per cent. The greatest rise in future intentions has been among those who are not working (+13 per cent) and the unemployed (+10 per cent).
- Since 2001, there has been a decrease in future intentions to learn among all groups except those who are not working, where they have increased from 40 per cent to 43 per cent.

**Table 11: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by working status**

| | Total | Full time | Part time | Unemployed | Not working | Retired |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 4,896 | 2,008 | 566 | 187 | 739 | 1,188 |
| Total likely | 41 | 50 | 48 | 54 | 43 | 12 |
| Total unlikely | 57 | 47 | 49 | 42 | 55 | 86 |

**Figure 9: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by working status**



# Access to the Internet

- Figures for access to the internet highlight that the digital divide continues to reinforce the learning divide (see Table 12).
- Just 27 per cent of people with no access to the internet reported current or recent participation, in contrast with 58 per cent of those with home access, and 71 per cent of people with access only at work.
- Table 12 shows that the majority of adults with internet access at work, also have internet access at home. This represents a marked shift from the 1999 survey.

**Table 12: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING AND FUTURE INTENTIONS TO LEARN, by access to the internet**

| | No internet access | Access at home and work | Access at work only |
|---|---|---|---|
| Base: all respondents = 100% | 2,627 | 2,064 | 141 |
| Current/recent participation in learning | 27 | 58 | 71 |
| Likely to learn in the future | 28 | 54 | 64 |
| Unlikely to learn in the future | 69 | 44 | 34 |

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# Other findings

Within the survey a range of additional questions were asked including: where, what and why people are learning; how people find out about learning opportunities; whether or not people are working towards qualifications; and what the motivations for, barriers to and benefits of learning. More detailed analysis and commentary on the full range of questions will be included in a report to be published by NIACE in November 2002.

Initial analysis of the data shows that:

- Computer skills/information technology/using the Internet is the most popular subject of study (29 per cent).
- Work (20 per cent), Family and friends (13 per cent) and work mates/colleagues (12 per cent) are the most common ways in which people find out about learning opportunities.
- When asked about changes that have happened as a result of learning, 29 per cent of learners report an improvement in self-confidence, 29 per cent report that they have developed as a person and 26 per cent say that they have met new people and made new friends.
- Six per cent of learners say that they did not choose to participate in learning, but were required to do so by their employer, for professional reasons or as a benefit requirement.
- The main factors preventing participation in learning are a lack of interest in learning (25 per cent) and work or other time pressures (20 per cent).
- The most common locations of learning are Further Education colleges (21 per cent), universities (16 per cent) and the workplace (15 per cent).
- Eight out of ten learners say that it is easy to get to where their learning takes place.
- Eighty-five per cent of people in full-time work hold a qualification, as do 82 per cent of those in part-time work and 81 per cent of unemployed adults.
- Employers are more likely to pay fees for outside courses for men (17 per cent) rather than women (12 per cent), and for full-time (24 per cent) rather than part-time workers (13 per cent).
- Thirty-four per cent of current/recent learners are/were not aiming for a qualification.
- Eighty-one per cent of people believe that learning is enjoyable for its own sake.

# Two steps forward, one step back

Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett

This year's survey of adult participation in learning tells a complicated tale. While participation has fallen since 2001, the data shows an overall trend of rising participation in the last six years, while also showing that progress has reinforced the gap between the learning-haves and the learning-have-nots. Adults in professional and managerial groups are more than twice as likely to learn as the poorest, least skilled and retired. The young participate in far greater numbers than the old, and those with jobs are more likely to have access to learning that those without. The survey suggests that there is a need for sustained policies to stimulate demand if we are to create a learning society for all.

Launched during Adult Learners' Week 2002, *Two steps forward, one step back* builds on NIACE's previous surveys of participation in adult learning (*The Learning Divide*, Sargant *et al*, 1997, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 016 1, £20.00 and *The Learning Divide Revisited*, Sargant, 2000, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 088 9, £22.95; *Winners and losers in an expanding system*, Aldridge and Tuckett, 2001, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 125 7, £6.00)

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